DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 866 HE 025 724

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TITLE Analysis of the Non-Retention of CUU First-Year Students.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Aspiration; *Academic Persistence; College Freshmen; *Dropout Attitudes; *Dropout Characteristics; *Dropout Research; Higher Education; *School Holding Power; Student Attitudes; *Student Attrition; Student Reaction; Surveys; Urban Universities; Withdrawal (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Chicago Urban University IL

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study designed to determine the reason first and post-first year students (N=61) chose to leave Chicago Urban University (CUU) prior to graduation. Data were sought from a random sample of 100 students via either a mailed or a telephone survey, with a 61% response rate. The 54-question interview/survey instrument examined the student's satisfaction with university/student services and the reason for leaving the school. Among the survey results were that over 90 percent of the respondents were content with the classroom experience and more than 80 percent were satisfied with tutoring, the library, bookstore services, the cultural programs, grading system, academic instruction, and campus security. Areas receiving the lowest satisfactory ratings included financial aid, faculty advisement, admission services, registration procedures, and faculty competence. Reasons for leaving the school centered on dissatisfaction with grades (41 percent), high tuition and fees (36 percent), family responsibilities (31 percent), insufficient financial aid (29 percent), and personal problems (27 percent). The study findings indicated that dissatisfaction and frustration with university programs and services may have been more the result of the student's personal difficulties, i.e. financial problems, family responsibilities, work, and academic unpreparedness than the university. It is noted that 87 percent of the responding students, however, intended to return to CUU at a future date. Contains nine references. (GLR)

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ANALYSIS OF THE NON-RETENTION OF CUU FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Earl J. Ogletree

Retention research shows that the highest amount of attrition occurs during the freshman year.[1] At Chicago Urban University only nineteen percent of first year students eventually graduate from the university. New freshman females have a higher graduation rate than their male counterpart.[2] There is also a higher retention rate of first year students than subsequent year students, except fifty percent of new freshmen and transferees leave after one or more years. And it takes CUU graduates five-six years to graduate, compared to five years nationally. To determine the factors that effect non-retention, a fall, 1991 survey of 603 students found that 81.6 percent of early leavers ("stop outs") planned to return to CUU and 386 actually re-enrolled, while 217 did not.[3] It was also found that the majority of students did not withdraw because of dissatisfaction with the services, faculty, staff and general academic and social milieu of the university, but for personal reasons--fiscal problems (42.8%), family problems (14.3%), work obligations (21.3%) or transferred to a an Illinois or out of state university (10.8%). However, a subsequent study found that non-persister had academic problems--difficulty developing study habits, lack of empowerment and developing close relationships with other students.[4]

To ascertain these results as to why first year students withdraw from CUU and their opinions of university/student services that may impact the attrition rate, additional research needs to be conducted.

Procedures

To determine the reason first and post-first year students chose to leave CUU prior to graduation, a population of 204 undergraduate non-persisters was identified from a January, 1992 list obtained from CUU records. A random sample of 100 was selected for the study of which 35% were males and 65% females. Data were collected by telephone interview and mailed questionnaire survey. A total of sixty-one students were survey by mail or interviewed by phone. The interview schedule/survey instrument included 54 questions, divided into two categories--"Satisfaction with University/Student Services and "Reason for Leaving the University."

Results

Analysis of the findings in Table I showed 87 percent of the respondents planned to complete a degree, 86 percent planned to return to CUU and 89 percent enjoyed attending CUU. Non-retained students' opinions of university/student services were in general positive, with a number of exceptions, as depicted in Table I.

TABLE I

OPINIONS OF UNIVERSITY/STUDENT SERVICES

Please indicate whether you were satisfied or dissatisfied with the following university services, programs and personnel.

University/Student Services	Percent * Satisfied	Dissatisfied	NA or Unsure
1. Faculty Advisement	75	20	05
2. Personal counseling	72	15	11
3. Admission services	75	24	0
4. Tutoring support services	85	04	11
5. Registration procedures	78	22	0
6. Library services	86	10	03
7. Academic instruction	88	12	0
8. Financial aid services	57	30	13
9. Computer services	35 (70)	15	60
10. Health services	66 (86)	10	24
11. Day care services	65 (86)	10	25
12. Proficiency exams	91	09	0
13. Reading 101 courses	72	20	08
14. Math 090, 095 courses	74	26	0
15. English 127, 222 courses	70	20	10
16. Social/cultural programs	87	10	03
17. Campus bookstore	87	10	03
18. Competency of faculty	74	20	04
19. Student input in Univ.policies	73	22	05
20. Grading system	83	16	0
21. Campus safety and security	85	15	0
22. Classroom facilities	94	06	0
23. Laboratory facilities	95	03	02

* Responses may not total 100%. Respondents omitted some items.
( ) Percentages adjusted for non-users of service.

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Students' assessment of the quality of university and student services showed a significant majority was satisfied with all the cited services. Over 90 percent were content with classroom and laboratory facilities and proficiency examinations. While over 80 percent found tutoring, library, bookstore services and cultural programs, grading system, academic instruction and campus security satisfactory, approximately three-fourth were pleased with faculty advisement, personal counseling, admission services, registration procedures, reading, English and math courses, competency of faculty and student participation in university policy making.

Although it appears only 65 and 66 percent felt health services and day care services were satisfactory, but when the results are adjusted by the number of users of the services, the actual percent of satisfaction was 86 percent. Similarly, the responses to computer services were adjusted from a 35 to 70 percent satisfaction rating.

The areas that received the lowest satisfactory ratings were financial aid (30%), faculty advisement (20%), admission services (24%), registration procedures (22%), reading, English and math remediation courses (20%-26%) and faculty competence (20%). There was no significant difference between the reponses of males and females.

The second part of the interview/survey instrument dealt with students' reason(s) for leaving the Chicago Urban University. The findings showed the reason(s) for withdrawal of first year students was based more on personal matters and factors over which the university had little control, e. g., tuition and fees, financial aid and other elements of university life, as illustrated in Table II.

TABLE II

Please indicate which of the following reason(s) lead you to withdraw from Chicago Urban University.

Reason for Leaving the University	Percent * Yes	NO	NA or Unsure
1. Difficulty studying	25	75	0
2. Not motivated	14	85	0
3. Too many personal problems	27	69	06
4. Had to work full time	12	87	0
5. Family responsibilities	31	69	0
6. Health problems	12	88	0
7. Financial problems	14	86	0
8. Influenced by family	02	98	0
9. Felt out of place, isolated	19	81	0
10. Did not know what I wanted to do	11	87	0
11. Married or birth of child	13	87	0
12. Took a break from academic work	07	93	0
18. Did not pass proficiency exam	08	92	0
13. Placed on probation	07	93	0
14. Dissatisfied with grades	41	59	0
15. Course work too difficult	07	93	0
16. Felt academically unprepared	14	86	0
17. Courses were irrelevant	15	85	0
18. Unavailability of needed courses	10	90	0
19. Courses not offered at convenient times	12	88	0
19. Tuition/fees too high	36	64	0
20. Academic advising unsatisfactory	18	82	0
21. Tutoring help unsatisfactory	15	85	0
22. Course content of major unsatisfactory	17	83	0
23. Financial aid unavailable or insufficient	29	61	0
24. College is irrelevant to my career goals	15	85	0
25. Programs/courses do not meet career goals	13	87	0
26. Availability of teaching faculty	12	88	0
27. Availability of advisors	09	91	0
28. Academic reputation of CUU	08	92	0
29. Racial composition of student body	02	98	0
30. Accessibility to administration	15	44	41
31. Transferred to another university	10	90	0

* Responses may not total 100%. Respondents omitted some items.

The findings in Table II as to the reason(s) for leaving Chicago Urban University indicate the major cause(s) were: 1) dissatisfaction with grades (41%), 2) high tuition and fees (36%), 3) family responsibilities (31%), 4) insufficient financial aid (29%), 5) personal problems (27%), 6) poor study habits (25%), and 7) social isolation (19%). A smaller percentage of respondents felt they were not motivated (14%), academically unprepared (15%), courses were irrelevant (14%), financial problems and had to work full time (12%), non-availability (10%) and timing of course offerings (12%), academic advisement (18%), availability of faculty (18%) and advisors (9%), and administration accessibility (15%). Thirteen percent felt a college education and the course work were not relevant to their career goals. Ten percent had no career goals. And ten percent transferred to a different university/college.

Such factors as racial composition of CUU (2%) and family influenced (2%), probation (7%), proficiency examinations (8%), difficult course work (7%) and the academic reputation of CUU (8%) appeared to have little influence on students withdrawing from Chicago Urban University.

Summary

The findings suggest non-retained students are satisfied with university/student services, perhaps not at the higher satisfactory level of students who continue at CUU. Nevertheless, their dissatisfaction and, perhaps, frustration with university programs and services may have been more the result of their personal difficulties--family responsibilities, financial problems, had to work, academic unpreparedness and poor study habits and motivation--than with the university. This appears to be verified by the fact that 89 percent said they had positive experiences at CUU. One's personal life has a significant impact on one's professional and academic performance and, in this instance, retention. Therefore, it follows that academic preparedness and performance effects retention, which the findings appear to show. The fact that 87 percent of the respondents were returning to CUU at a future date, suggests they are not dropouts, but "stop outs." They have taken time-out in their academic studies to resolve their personal situation and problems.

Recommendations

Chicago Urban University and, particularly, the Office of Academic Support has a number retention programs and services, including innovative grants for faculty to develop programs and creative techniques to develop to enhance teaching and learning

to help students persist and succeed. The results of this study indicate that financial aid should be increased and monitored. Additional funding sources need to contacted, including the CUU foundation. Additional programs and services to assist unprepared and unmotivated students. These could include: 1)peer-tutoring learning; 2) identify students' learning style and teach to it; 3) use of orientation courses for unprepared students to teach goal setting, time management, note taking,reading comprehension, memory skills, taking exams, decision making, reducing stress, and mathematics anxiety; 4) increase faculty-student contact by rewarding it; 5)offer full-semester, credit earning, courses, e.g., "student adjustment" or "student success," using faculty, counselors and peer mentors and small class sizes; and 6) control the number of credits freshman students can carry. In addition, students' assessment of university/student services and the student retention programs should be monitored annually.

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